



December 4, 2008 - St. Joseph Elementary School To Close In June 2009

December 4, 2008, Salem, MA - No one is immune to the difficult economic challenges being faced by families in Salem, across the Commonwealth and throughout America, certainly not even the Catholic Church.

For several years the Church has been working very hard to strengthen Catholic education here in Salem. In many ways we have been successful due to the great commitment of our parents, teachers and students to Catholic education. In other ways we have been less successful, particularly as it relates to enrollment and balancing our financial needs while maintaining a strong academic record at St. Joseph's.

Despite a vigorous effort over the past four years to increase enrollment, while balancing financial and academic needs, St. Joseph Elementary School, located at 160 Federal St. in Salem, MA, announced it will close at the conclusion of the current academic year in June 2009.

Currently there are 165 students enrolled, down from 188 in 2003. While there has been a marked increase in enrollment since a low of 141 in 2005, efforts to bring the school up to the 250 students needed for it to be viable have not been achieved. This has resulted in a steady and significant budget deficit each year resulting in a current academic year shortfall of \$215,000.

In making the announcement, Rev. John E. Sheridan, Pastor of Saint James Parish, said, "The need to close St. Joseph School is not a failure of our parish nor of our community. It comes after much deliberation, an extensive review of the facts and with only the best intentions for the greater good of our students and the entire parish community. We tried to make it work. Low enrollment and the hard reality of today's economy make it impossible to increase tuition much more. Our parish has significant debt and the reality is that we can not ask more of our families."

He added, "St. Joseph School has provided an outstanding Catholic education to children of Salem for 116 years. We give thanks for the wonderful education of so many the abundant graces we have experienced during this long and proud history, especially the work and support of the Sisters of the Assumption." Following the closure of St. Joseph Parish in 2004, St. Joseph School moved into its current location on Federal Street, which had been vacant for ten years following the closing of the former Federal Street School. Since 2004, the Archdiocese has provided more than \$1.1 Million in debt relief and direct support, which includes \$600,000 in funds to renovate the schools and \$550,000 to fund the school operations.

Currently, the total debt to the Archdiocese, assumed by the school and the responsibility of the parish, exceeds \$250,000 and the debt is likely to increase this year due to the projected loss of \$215,000. Fr. Sheridan said, "Given the many good works supported by the efforts of parishes and social service ministries across the Archdiocese, we simply can not ask anymore of our Church given the financial constraints being felt across the local Church. We thank our tithing parishes, our alumni, friends and supporters, and we are grateful for the continued support of the Archdiocese. We look forward to continuing to work together to reduce our overall debt in the months and years ahead."

Every student currently enrolled is guaranteed a seat in one of the neighboring Catholic schools. The Catholic School Office for the Archdiocese will work closely with parents to provide for a smooth transition to one of the schools. An open house will be scheduled at St. Joseph School in January 2009 with Catholic schools from the surrounding communities.

Teachers and staff will have the opportunity to apply for other available positions at Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Boston.

Teachers were notified of the decision yesterday, December 3rd.